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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000296

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Aftermath of Final Winograd Report
- [1](#)2. Mideast
- [1](#)3. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz and other media quoted Dr. Abu-Osama Abed Al-Makati, Hamas's representative in Iran, as saying on Wednesday that Israel can expect a wave of suicide bombings inside its 1967 borders. Al-Ma'ati described the suicide bombing earlier this week in Dimona as just the beginning. The announcement came as Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip launched at least 10 Qassam rockets into Israel, lightly wounding two girls in Kibbutz Be'eri. The Jerusalem Post quoted sources close to Hamas as saying that thousands of Arab men poured into Gaza through the breached border, offering to join in the fight against Israel. Overnight IAF strikes in Gaza killed six militants -- five from Hamas and one from Islamic Jihad. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that a poll released on Wednesday showed Hamas receiving a boost in popularity from their actions in breaching the Egyptian border.

The Jerusalem Post quoted defense officials as saying on Wednesday that there is a growing possibility that the IDF will retake the Philadelphi Corridor between the Gaza Strip and Sinai to prevent arms smuggling and terrorist infiltration. The media reported that PM Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and FM Tzipi Livni held an informal meeting on Wednesday in which they were briefed on the situation in southern Israel. Reportedly, they decided construction of a fence needed to begin immediately along parts of Israel's 230-km border with Egypt. Although no formal announcement was made, it is believed that work will begin near Nitzana in the northern region of the border, and in Eilat in its south. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe and Israel Radio cited a Kuwaiti newspaper that Hamas threatens to kidnap Egyptian soldiers.

The media cited ongoing controversy around the comments of Winograd Commission member Prof. Yehezkel Dror. Media reported that many politicians, including MK Avigdor Yitzhaki from Kadima -- a former coalition whip, who tendered his resignation from the Knesset this morning -- demanded the establishment of a state commission of inquiry. The media quoted Meretz leader MK Dr. Yossi Beilin as saying that Dror's remarks were chilling and that they prove that the commission acted on behalf of the government.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel will begin reducing on Thursday the amount of electricity it supplies to the Gaza Strip, as part of punitive measures against the Hamas government. The power cutback was made possible last week, when the High Court of Justice turned down appeals by several rights groups against the sanctions.

Marc Otte, EU special envoy to the Middle East, was quoted as saying in interview with Ha'aretz on Wednesday that Israel's policies in the Gaza Strip are likely to turn the territory into a new Somalia. "Israel's tactics in the Gaza Strip did not work," Otte was quoted as saying. "The blockade and the sanctions against the population failed, and only strengthened Hamas and weakened [PM Salam] Fayyad and Abu Mazen [President Mahmoud Abbas]."

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Ruchama Avraham, the minister in charge of relations with the Knesset, as saying on Tuesday that Israel will continue to allow cash to enter Gaza as it is in Israel's interest.

Leading media reported that Iran has started using advanced centrifuges at its nuclear facility in Natanz.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday a group of Palestinian and Israeli law enforcement officers met for a discussion of crime-fighting techniques and cooperation.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, looking to upgrade its sea-based capabilities, the Israel Navy has submitted a Request for Proposal to the U.S. Navy for a new missile ship -- the Littoral Combat Ship -- currently under development by Lockheed Martin Corp.

Yediot reported that Defense Minister Barak will visit Turkey next week. The newspaper wrote that Barak will promote several defense deals with that country.

Ha'aretz reported that the GOI's Water Authority warns that Israel might soon not be able to utilize a significant part of its national water (groundwater reservoir) sources. The Authority cited the low quality of the water and climate change.

On Wednesday The Jerusalem Post reviewed the upcoming visit to Israel (February 9-15) of blues, gospel, and jazz singer Janice Harrington under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy.

I1. Aftermath of Final Winograd Report:

Summary:

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The suspicion is that the Winograd Commission was... a body set up to protect the Prime Minister."

Liberal columnist Ofer Shelach wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "[Professor Yehezkel] Dror is right.... Olmert ought to have resigned a long time ago. The politicians who support him ought to have paid a price."

The nationalist Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "Elections must be scheduled as soon as possible in order to clear the public atmosphere in Israel."

Block Quotes:

II. "A Suspicious Failure"

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/7): "In the second, analytical part of the [Winograd] report, Prof. Yehezkel Dror and his colleagues devoted about 200 outstanding pages to crucifying the IDF. However, not a single page was devoted to the preparation and conduct of the Prime Minister's Office.... Dror's statements to the daily newspaper Maariv stir suspicions of the commission's failure.... The suspicion is that the Winograd Commission was... a body set up to protect the Prime Minister. The suspicion is that the Annapolis Summit accounts for the inexplicable gap between the commission's treatment of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in the interim report and its treatment of Olmert in the final report. The suspicion is that the commission that was appointed by Olmert identified with him politically and therefore protected him. The suspicion is that members of the commission knowingly betrayed their task due to extraneous considerations.... After 18 months of stagnation under Olmert and in the shadow of Winograd, Israel needs a sound leadership that enjoys the public's confidence -- a new leadership, a legitimate leadership, a leadership that is not protected."

II. "Professor Dror Is Not to Blame"

Liberal columnist Ofer Shelach wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/7): "The mandate of the [Winograd] Commission, the circumstances in which it was established, its composition, and its legal standing left no chance that it would pass a guilty verdict against Olmert. Consequently the commission was handed a burden which its members were unable to bear. Prof. Gavison's legal stratagems, and the interim report, which was a kind of riposte to the impasse in which the commission members found themselves, only made the situation worse. All this has been known to the public for a long time, but in Israel knowledge never prevails upon infantile politics fuelled by the news media.... Olmert, cynical and self-possessed, established the Winograd Commission. That commission ought to have been disqualified in the eyes of everyone, including the commission members themselves. But those five well-meaning members, including one [Professor Yehezkel Dror] whose judgment has been made amply clear in the past few days, turned into a kind of dumb oracle. Everyone was waiting expectantly for their pronouncement, but they were unable to say anything of significance. They produced a lame, emasculated report, and now everybody is trying to find a conspiracy under the carpet, all this in a blaze of publicity. Dror is right. Everyone ought to have made his own political judgment without waiting for this superfluous report. Olmert ought to have resigned a long time ago. The politicians who

support him ought to have paid a price. The protest ought to be permanent, nationwide, and ought to reflect what the opinion polls show. Anyone who is not capable of all this has no right to dump the responsibility on one professor who does not really understand what has happened to him."

III. "The Public Will Judge"

The nationalist Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (2/7): "It seems that those who believe that anything that comes in contact with Ehud Olmert is permeated with rot and corruption, are right. This is the feeling today, after the presentation of lukewarm [Winograd report] a week ago and following remarks by [Professor Yehezkel Dror], a senior member of the [Winograd] Commission. It is a body that even those who wanted a state commission of inquiry defended, confident in its integrity and the seriousness of its members. Today, some still accept the report as is. But skepticism remains. Elections must be scheduled as soon as possible in order to clear the public atmosphere in Israel."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "For decades Egypt has been accusing Israel of alienating the Palestinians and punishing them.... The open border acted like a boomerang to Egyptian claims, causing them great embarrassment.... Egypt has ... fallen victim to its own rhetoric."

Block Quotes:

"You Don't Play Around When It Comes to Egypt"

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/7): "For decades Egypt has been accusing Israel of alienating the Palestinians and punishing them, while Egypt, like the other Arabs, claim, of course, that the Palestinians should be helped. That was successful and risk-free rhetoric, since the Palestinians were entirely within the sphere of Israeli responsibility. The Egyptians thus completely ignored the Palestinians and also enjoyed blaming Israel. Pro-Palestinian rhetoric was an Arab weapon against Israel. Israeli pressure on Gaza, which led to the breakdown of the border between Gaza and Sinai, did away with the old game rules. The open border acted like a boomerang to Egyptian claims, causing them great embarrassment. How can Israel be blamed when the Arab sides do nothing for the Palestinians?.... Egypt has thus fallen victim to its own rhetoric. If it uses violence to close the border, it will be said, with justification, that it is crueler than Israel. And if it does not close the border, the Palestinian problem also becomes its problem. In the meantime, Egypt, in confusion, is doing both.... If Egypt is sucked into Gaza, it will be at its expense, and that is something that Hamas does not want.... Since Gaza suddenly erupted, hundreds of thousands began to move into Sinai, and the Islamic opposition rejoiced at [President Mubarak's] expense. He now realizes that he must no longer ignore Gaza, since if he does, Gaza is liable to get back to him and to his rule."

12. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Though

Europe is acting blindly to its own self-interest, let alone Israel's, our government should make clear that any nation that fails to take minimal effective steps to confront the Iranian threat cannot be considered a friend of the Jewish state."

Block Quotes:

"Stop Fueling Iran"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/7):
"Iran, and the radical Islamist movement it spearheads, pose the greatest totalitarian threat to international peace and security since the defeats of Soviet communism and Nazi fascism. As in the 1930s, we are at the point when the threat is growing, but can still be stopped by imposing draconian diplomatic and economic sanctions, without military force. Europe's foot-dragging on sanctions is leading inevitably to military action, war, a nuclear Iran, or some combination of the exact scenarios that European leaders claim they want to avoid. The refusal to impose small economic costs now will result in major economic costs -- both through rising terrorism and oil prices -- to European economies later, not to mention growing loss of life, freedom and security in the world. Though Europe is acting blindly to its own self-interest, let alone Israel's, our government should make clear that any nation that fails to take minimal effective steps to confront the Iranian threat cannot be considered a friend of the Jewish state."
JONES